

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 9, 2007

The Honorable Donald C. Winter  
Secretary of the Navy  
1000 Navy Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20350-1000

Secretary Winter:

As you know, it has always been my hope that the Navy and the State of North Carolina would be able to reach a mutually acceptable agreement on the location of the Outlying Landing Field (OLF) that would properly take into account the national security needs of the nation as well as the environmental and local concerns of North Carolinians. To date this has not happened, and it has become apparent to me that a solution is as far from being reached today as it ever has been.

Now that the public hearings held in eastern North Carolina over the past four weeks have concluded, my own concerns about the Navy's decision to locate its OLF at Site C in Washington County have been reaffirmed. Issues regarding the location of an Outlying Landing Field in Washington County fall largely into three categories. 1) the environmental impact of the OLF on the substantial migratory waterfowl and other wildlife at the nearby Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, 2) the economic impact to the citizens of Washington and Beaufort counties to include those directly affected by the confiscation of their property to construct the OLF, and 3) the hazard presented to our military pilots by training in an area with such a high concentration of birds. It is clear to me that there is insurmountable and growing opposition to the Washington County Site, which compels me to reject Site C as the Navy's preferred location for the OLF.

I have attached a list of specific concerns and reasons I believe the Navy has erred in its decision to locate the OLF at Site C. These concerns in no way represent all of the issues that have been raised, but include those that I believe make an OLF at Site C an untenable proposition. I encourage you to review these items and join me in concluding that Site C is not a viable option for the OLF.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. Burr', with a stylized, flowing script.

Richard Burr  
United States Senator

## **Concerns Regarding the Location of a Navy OLF at Washington County, NC**

Issues regarding the location of an Outlying Landing Field in Washington County fall largely into three categories. 1) the environmental impact of the OLF on the substantial migratory waterfowl and other wildlife at the nearby Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, 2) the economic impact to the citizens of Washington and Beaufort counties to include those directly affected by the confiscation of their property to construct the OLF, and 3) the hazard presented to our military pilots by training in an area with such a high concentration of birds.

### **The Environment**

- The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service believes the Navy has drawn conclusions that are more definitive than the data can support. While the data that is available is in itself limited, that by definition should require a level of cautiousness as opposed to the disregard exhibited in the Navy's interpretation of the findings.
- Loss of foraging habitat would change the behavior of the 100,000 birds that winter in the area in ways that are impossible to predict. As the adequacy of the area to support wintering waterfowl diminishes following the Navy's removal of over 30,000 acres of habitat, the ability of the remaining area to support the birds is doubtful.
- Noise studies conducted to evaluate waterfowl reactions were carried out in a manner fundamentally different than that of the multiple take-offs and landings which will occur at Site C. For this reason and others, it is impossible to reliably predict what the effect of the noise will be on the surrounding environment.
- Moreover, physiological impacts were not studied by the Navy in its attempts to determine the impact of noise on the waterfowl living near Site C. Only observed behavioral reactions to noise were taken into account during the study. Again, there is a lack of data to support the Navy's findings that birds will be unaffected by the noise caused by an OLF.
- The Fish & Wildlife Service estimates that the loss of foraging habitat combined with the noise disturbance has the potential to cause significant numbers of waterfowl to stop wintering in and around the refuge. The greater impacts of this remain unknown.
- The alteration of the path of migration would be in direct opposition to the reason the Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge was created. There is little doubt that an OLF would negatively impact the wintering habits of migratory waterfowl along the entire Atlantic Flyway. Despite these concerns, migration paths and habits were not addressed in the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS).

### **Economic Impact**

- Washington County already suffers from a depressed economy. The Navy's plan would not only hinder development but in all likelihood would ensure the County's economic failure. The Navy has not addressed the adverse economic impact of the OLF on the current residents of Washington County sufficiently.
- Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler estimates that the current OLF proposal would cause estimated agricultural losses of up to \$6 million annually and the loss of over 30,000 acres of prime North Carolina farmland.
- A new \$200 million ethanol plant will be built in Beaufort County. Over 40 million bushels of corn will be required for this plant and corn demand in eastern North Carolina will increase dramatically in response. Corn grown on Washington County



farms in the future will likely be used for the production of ethanol at this facility. In failing to recognize the increase in the demand and price of corn, the Navy underestimated the negative economic impact to Beaufort and Washington Counties that the loss of over 30,000 acres of prime farmland at Site C would cause.

- Consequently, the Navy's estimated land values don't reflect the added value that corn production has caused. As a result, the Draft SEIS miscalculated and underestimated the loss caused by Navy confiscation of farms to both land owners and county tax rolls.
- The result of the Navy's confiscation of private property, and conversion of the land to government use, will reduce land value to zero as a taxable asset and eliminate tax revenue for the affected counties.

### Safety of our Military Pilots

- The Bird Avoidance Model developed by the United States Air Force forecasted the bird strike potential for Site C as "Severe". This rating is rarely used and is the poorest rating of all of the OLF sites under consideration.
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture says that an OLF at Site C presents "unique challenges" due to the high density of migratory waterfowl around the site.
- The safety of our men and women in uniform who will use the OLF for training has been overlooked by the Navy in its haste to build the OLF.
- Numerous experts on Bird-Aircraft Strike Hazard (BASH), including the former head of the Air Force's BASH Team, have examined the site. One expert referred to Site C as the worst place to situate an air field for jet training that he had ever seen.
- During tests conducted in 2005, onlookers, including a former Naval Flight Officer, witnessed the near collision of a Navy test plane and a flock of swans.
- The Navy's own BASH expert calls the Navy's conclusion that the bird strike hazard at Site C is similar to other sites in the area erroneous. He goes on to say that "in light of the extraordinary concentration of large flocking birds in close proximity to the Washington County site, and the very limited studies that have been conducted there, the bird strike risk should be revisited and a safer location considered."